N° VIII.

THE THEATRICAL CENSOR.

BY A CITIZEN.

Quem res plus nimio delectavêre secundæ,
Mutatæ quatient. . . . . HOR.

Those whom the smiles of fate too much delight,
Their sudden frowns more shake and more affright!
CREECH.

PHILADELPHIA, JANUARY 16, 1806.

UNDER a severe pressure of bodily affliction, the Theatrical Censor resumes his labours; and, fearful that his numerous readers may attribute his silence to some cause which may operate against him, is anxious to assure them that in future they will experience no similar disappointment; as, if the hand of sickness should still prevent his attendance at the theatre, the present publisher has engaged a gentleman of acknowledged talents to supply matter for the work.

To those who have been kind enough to express their hopes that the Theatrical Censor will not be induced, on any consideration, to cease from his employment, he has to answer that, as inclination, without hope of reward, prompted the undertaking, he certainly, at this time, when inclination is seconded by profit, would not relinquish it. In spite of individual murmurs and accusations of partiality, the public voice acknowledges the justness of his remarks; and it is sufficiently visible that some reformation has consequently taken place in the theatre.

The discontent of the green-room, and the illiberal language of some of its members are not unknown to us. We

never had an idea that our paper would be pleasing to them; for "criticism," as the judicious Lessing observes, "is often as disagreeable to those we praise as to those we condemn. The former think they are not sufficiently commended, and the latter, that they are too much blamed." A number of anecdotes, illustrative of this observation, which the Philadelphia *company* have supplied, are sent to us to publish; but, we trust, we shall never have sufficient provocation from the parties to occasion such a step.

In the present theatrical corps, it is true, there are some excellent performers; and we have proofs that the managers have done much to supply its defects. Mrs. Wignell, in general, is nearly as good an actress as England can produce. Mrs. Melmoth is far above mediocrity. Mrs. Woodham, although her voice is not good, is a very pleasing and useful performer. Mrs. Francis is always correct and lively. Mrs. Wood has great merit in certain characters, and Mrs. Jefferson may become valuable by a little attention to the graces and the delicacies of pronunciation. As to voice, Nature has done very little for either of the latter. Mrs. Seymour, with a good voice, has neither judgment nor ear. It is therefore devoutly to be wished that the managers could meet with a good female singer or two. Music furnishes more than half the charms of the drama; and where *sense* is so often violated, we should at least be compensated by *sound*.

Mr. Warren, with some faults, is an excellent performer. Mr. Wood is very respectable in genteel comedy. Mr. Cain, possessed of a good figure and voice, might, by care and study, recover the favor of the public, which, if he continue much longer in the careless track he has taken, he must inevitably lose: his walk is sentimental comedy. Mr. Jefferson is a respectable comic actor, *in burletta;* and in very broad farce he is inimitable. As a pantomimic clown he surpasses most others. The *naïveté* of Mr. Blisset in

Country Boys, where the Yorkshire dialect is not requisite is admirable; and his *Old Man*, in caricature, receives a colouring which gives astonishing interest to his performance. Mr. Harwood, to taste and genius adds a good knowledge of life and manners: in such characters as *Ollapod*, *Pangloss*, &c. we never desire to see a better actor. Mr. Francis is the best general performer we ever saw. He is an invaluable treasure to the stage. Mr. Bray in *Yorkshire Lads*, where chaste simplicity is intended, exceeds many performers of greater fame. This gentleman, we are confident, will one day make a conspicuous figure in Comedy.

Mr. Cross in Comic Opera would generally give satisfaction. Mr. Woodham is the most scientific singer on the American boards; but, like the generality of good singers, he is a very indifferent actor.

Of all these, none are without faults; and we shall never be deterred, either by fear or affection, from pointing them out, when they are too glaring.

A first and second tragedian are much wanted; and there is no doubt that the managers would find it their interest to try every method of obtaining them. In the name of Harmony let them procure a good female singer!

Monday Evening, Jan. 13.

CINDERELLA.

This piece was again performed (for the fifth time) to a crowded audience; and we were astonished to observe more blunders in the scenery, &c. than even on the first evening. It was given as a first piece, for the convenience of young persons whose parents might wish them to retire early to bed.

THREE WEEKS AFTER MARRIAGE;
OR,
WHAT WE MUST ALL COME TO.

Sir Charles Racket, Wood;—*Drugget*, Jefferson;—*Woodley*, Rutherford;—*Servant*, Durang;—*Lady Racket*, Mrs. Wood;—*Mrs. Drugget*, Mrs. Cunningham;—*Nancy*, Mrs. Hunt;—*Dimity*, Mrs. Francis.

Arthur Murphy wrote this Comedy in 1772, and it was performed at Covent Garden in 1776. It affords a very striking proof of the capriciousness of public taste, and the injustice of some public determinations. The author first produced it under the title of 'What We Must All Come To,' and it was damned almost without a hearing; but Mr. Lewis ventured to bring it forward again some years after, with its new name, for his benefit, and it was then received with the most extravagant applause.

Without comment on the taste of the English, we must observe, that no piece could have been performed here more *mal-à-propos*. A great number of young persons and children had been drawn to the theatre by the glitter of Cinderella; and it is evident that the indecent allusions and *double entendres* of "Three Weeks after Marriage" were not proper to their edification.

MODERN ANTIQUES; OR, THE MERRY MOURNERS.

Old Cockletop, Francis;—*Joey*, Blisset;—*Napkin*, Durang;—*Mrs. Cockletop*, Mrs. Francis;—*Mrs. Camomile*, Mrs. Cunningham;—*Belinda*, Mrs. Jefferson;—*Nan*, Mrs. Seymour.

The most stubborn phiz must bend into laughter at this piece; and Francis, Blisset and Mr. Francis could not fail to make the most mournful audience merry, in their parts of *Cockletop*, *Joey*, and *Mrs. Cockletop*. Mr. Durang, as *Napkin* pleased us very much. Mrs. Seymour's *Nan* was a good performance.

Wednesday Evening, Jan. 15.

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS.

Duke of Norfolk, Wood;—*Lord Herries*, Cain;—*Sir William Cecil*, M'Kenzie;—*Earl of Huntingdon*, Taylor;—*Davidson*, Rutherford; *Sir Amias Paulet*, Francis;—*Earl of Shrewsbury*, Cross;—*Nawe*, Blisset;—*Queen Elizabeth*, Mrs. Melmoth;—*Lady Douglas*, Mrs. Jefferson;—*Lady Scrope*, Mrs. Seymour;—*Mary, Queen of Scots*, Mrs. Wignell.

Mr. St. John wrote this tragedy in 1783, and it was acted at Drury Lane for the first time in 1789, with great applause. The story is interesting to Britons; and it is well worked up by the author. The thinness of the audience this evening must be attributed to the severity of the weather. The acting of Mrs. Wignell, Mrs. Melmoth, and Mr. Wood, was very fine. Mr. Rutherford takes more pains with his feet than with his head. That gentleman always appears to be preparing for a minuet. The conclusion of his sentences is marked by a certain cadence, entirely foreign to our ear. It is more easily felt than described. His constant lolling the head from side to side is an unnatural affectation. Our wish is to impress on Mr. R. the necessity of paying as much attention to the head and arms, as to the legs and feet. Mr. R. has our best wishes; and we trust he will consider this as the serious admonition of a friend.

WHO's THE DUPE?

Old Doily, Jefferson;—*Granger*, Wood;—*Sandford*, Rutherford;—*Jeremy Gradus*, Harwood;—*Servant to Doily*, Durang;—*Miss Doily*, Mrs. Jefferson;—*Caroline*, Mrs. Francis.

This piece was acted with considerable applause at Drury Lane, in 1779. It is, in our opinion, Mrs. Cowley's *chef-d'œuvre*. Animated and lively, possessing the true *vis comica*, it never offends by indecent allusions or improbable circumstances.

Gradus was very well represented by Harwood. *Old Doily* was rather too much caricatured by Mr. Jefferson, but, we acknowledge, not unpleasantly so. In one or two instances he did not sufficiently command his countenance, when he should be serious. We have, however, seen the character worse performed in London. Mr. Wood's *Granger* pleased us extremely. His gravity was well maintained. If Mrs. Jefferson were as animated as Mrs. Francis, the managers might often treat the public with this farce, which is, indeed, a *bonne-bouche*.

Mr. Renaigle deserves great praise for the arrangement of the music between the scenes of the tragedy. It was a fine treat to those who are pleased with Scotch ballads. The Hottentots in the gallery, however, were bawling out for *Tid-re-I*, and *Jefferson's March*. Would these gentlemen were marched off in the time of the former tune! The constables, we conceive, would be more advantageously employed in this boisterous region than at the doors. The talisman of these gentlemen might be sometimes well applied to the throats of the lovers of *Tid-re-I*.

Mr. Censor,

I frequent the theatre very little, for reasons which I might explain to you, if I were not afraid of wounding the pride of the performers, and making enemies, as I suppose you have done, among the children of Thalia. Cinderella, however, excited my curiosity. I heard all my friends praising it to the skies. One admired the beauty of the scenes; another spoke in raptures of Cupids, Venuses, Nymphs, Hymens, and all the rest of the mythological divinities. I have seen many things of this kind in France and England, which gave me great delight; and I was induced yesterday evening to brave the severity of the weather, and take a peep at this famous *spectacle*. I took a seat in the pit, amid a

crowd of noisy young men, women and children. The curtain had scarcely risen, when I felt myself very uncomfortable, on seeing several poor infants suspended by ropes, in attitudes which made me suppose they had been placed there as a punishment: in a few minutes, however, I was convinced this was not the case, as they were let down to assist in a rigadoon with the rest of the celestials. I was a long time endeavouring to find out Venus among them, and had it not been for the politeness of a person who sat near me, and who, as often as he could desist from cracking nuts and munching apples, favoured me with a word, I might have gone home without distinguishing the goddess from her nymphs. Would you believe it, Mr. Censor, the beautiful queen of Citherea was dressed in a blue gown, trimmed with gold, and had on a good comfortable pair of shoes and stockings. She flourished a long white wand, and sung in such a style, as made Olympus ring again. On consulting my Mythological Dictionary, I found that Venus should have been dressed very differently, and that the Cinderella Venus I had seen had no likeness in heaven above, or the earth beneath. I think also, the actors might express their meaning by gestures, rather than dancing, in which they are very imperfect. I see better dancing every evening at private balls. Mrs. Woodham, who played Cinderella, does not appear to me to have sufficiently studied pantomime. Her gestures are too confused, and the pains she takes to be graceful destroys the effect. Her arms are too often crossed above her head, which is the most ungraceful figure of the human body. She has, however, great expression of countenance, and displayed in some passages the most undoubted proofs, that, with a little study, she may attain a very high place in pantomime. She managed the scene, where she first discovers her sisters at the ball, admirably. The prince, who is eternally dancing, appeared to me to have more love for that exercise, than for Cinderella; for every sentiment of

pain or pleasure is expressed by a caper. But every one has his fault.

I shall not conclude this letter, Mr. Censor, without remarking the absurdity of Cinderella's changing her shoes on the stage, for those which are brought her by the nymph, whom I imagined to be Venus's shoemaker. There is a want of delicacy in this, which must ever shock the better part of the audience.

I might say a great deal of this piece, and point out a thousand inconsistencies in the performance. I might say that the mice, pumpion and horses, are very badly contrived; but I know the difficulty of getting these things well done; having myself been manager of a country company upwards of a year, and was frequently obliged to introduce a pig for an elephant. I would, however, through the medium of your paper, give the boys who play the horses, a hint not to peep at the audience under the trappings, which should conceal them. Tom Urchin was recognized by one of his playfellows in the gallery. Hymen's singing, in some measure, made amends for the screaming of the other immortals, who seem to be entirely disowned by Apollo. With wishes for your better health, that you may continue with spirit your employment,

I remain your obedient servant,

NICHOLAS BOTTOM.

The Editor begs his readers to excuse the delay they have experienced in this Work, which will be continued weekly under a new arrangement. Subscriptions received at the Literary Publication Office, No. 42, Walnut-Street, and, as usual, by John Philips. No single Numbers will in future be sold. The subscription is 50 cents for four Numbers, which will be delivered at the houses of Subscribers, if required, every Saturday. The next Number will not appear till Saturday se'nnight. Those who wish to have this work regularly are requested to send their names and places of abode to the Publishers, as early as possible. The subscription money to be paid in advance.